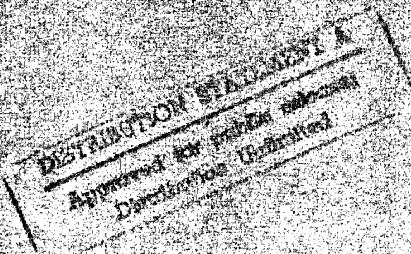


# WAR ON DRUGS

Heroin Busts, Purity,  
and Quantities Seized  
Over the Past 10 Years



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# GAO

United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

General Government Division

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May 27, 1992

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.  
Chairman  
The Honorable Frank Horton  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Government Operations  
House of Representatives

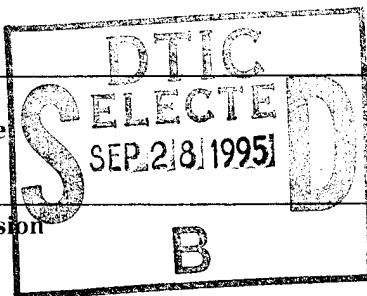
This fact sheet responds to your March 18, 1992, letter regarding the apparently greater availability of heroin in the United States. Specifically, you were concerned about changes in heroin's street price and purity levels--two indicators of heroin availability. You asked us to provide available data for the past 10 years on heroin price and purity levels and on heroin seizures. You also asked us to comment on whether progress has been made to reduce the frequency of double-counting of drug seizures caused by multiple agencies reporting the same seizure. In addition, you asked us to provide data specifically on New York City heroin seizures. We briefed your staff on the results of our work on May 15, 1992.

#### RESULTS

Price and purity information on heroin is developed by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) through its Domestic Monitor Program. The program's objective is to monitor the retail-level heroin situation. This objective is accomplished by making undercover heroin purchases in selected U.S. cities and analyzing the heroin for price, purity, adulterants/diluents, and geographic source area.

A comparison of average heroin price and purity levels reported through DEA's Domestic Monitor Program over the past 10 years shows that the price of heroin per milligram decreased slightly from \$2.72 in 1982 to \$2.12 in 1991, and the purity level (the percent of pure heroin) increased from 7.1 percent in 1982 to 27.6 percent in 1991. During this same period, the price of heroin per milligram in the New York City area decreased from \$1.35 in 1982 to \$0.75 in 1991, and purity increased from 3.8 percent in 1982 to 48.4 percent in 1991.

There have been fluctuations in both price and purity levels of heroin over the last 10 years. For example, from 1989 to 1990, the average price increased from \$1.79 to \$4.36 per



May 92

War on Drugs:  
Heroin Price, Purity,  
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milligram and decreased to \$2.12 in 1991. The average purity level from 1989 to 1990 decreased from 25.2 percent to 18.2 percent, then increased in 1991 to 27.6 percent.

Regarding drug seizure data, the accurate reporting of the quantities of drugs seized by federal law enforcement agencies has been a long-standing problem because of the double-counting that may occur. When multiple agencies are jointly involved in a drug seizure, sometimes each agency takes credit for the total amount of drugs seized. The Federal-wide Drug Seizure System (FDSS) was designed to eliminate double-counting of drug seizures by assigning a single control number to each seizure. An example of the double-counting that can occur can be seen in appendix I, which compares the total heroin seizures reported through FDSS with the sum of the seizures reported by the individual agencies.

Data from FDSS, which became fully operational in fiscal year 1989, show that heroin seizures by all federal agencies increased from 2,415 pounds in 1989 to 3,034 pounds in 1991, a 26-percent increase.

Heroin seizure data provided by the New York City Police Department showed that the quantity seized decreased from 1,089 pounds in 1989 to 89 pounds in 1991. (The 1989 seizure quantity includes one case in which 832 pounds was seized.)

Details on heroin price and purity levels for the past 10 years are included in appendix II. Seizure data for the same time period are included in appendix III. Heroin seizure data for the Federal Bureau of Investigation are not included because a Bureau official said drug-specific seizure statistics are not maintained.

#### OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objectives were to (1) gather data for the past 10 years on the price and purity levels of heroin and the quantities of heroin seized and (2) comment on double-counting of drug seizure data. We were also asked to provide information on heroin seizures by the New York City Police Department.

To address these objectives, we reviewed statistics on price and purity levels from DEA's Domestic Monitor Program and drug seizure statistics from FDSS. We discussed heroin seizure statistics with officials of DEA, the Customs Service, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Coast Guard. We obtained seizure statistics that they maintain on heroin seizures. We also obtained heroin seizure statistics from the New York City Police

Department. We did not test the FDSS data or the seizure data provided by the agencies for accuracy.

We discussed the information in this report with DEA officials. They provided comments and suggestions to clarify some information, and we incorporated these suggestions where appropriate.

- - - - -  
As agreed with the Committee, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of this letter, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier. At that time, we will make copies available upon request.

The major contributors to this fact sheet are listed in appendix IV. If you have any questions concerning this report, please call me at (202) 566-0026.

*Harold A. Valentine*

Harold A. Valentine  
Associate Director, Administration  
of Justice Issues

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FIGURE

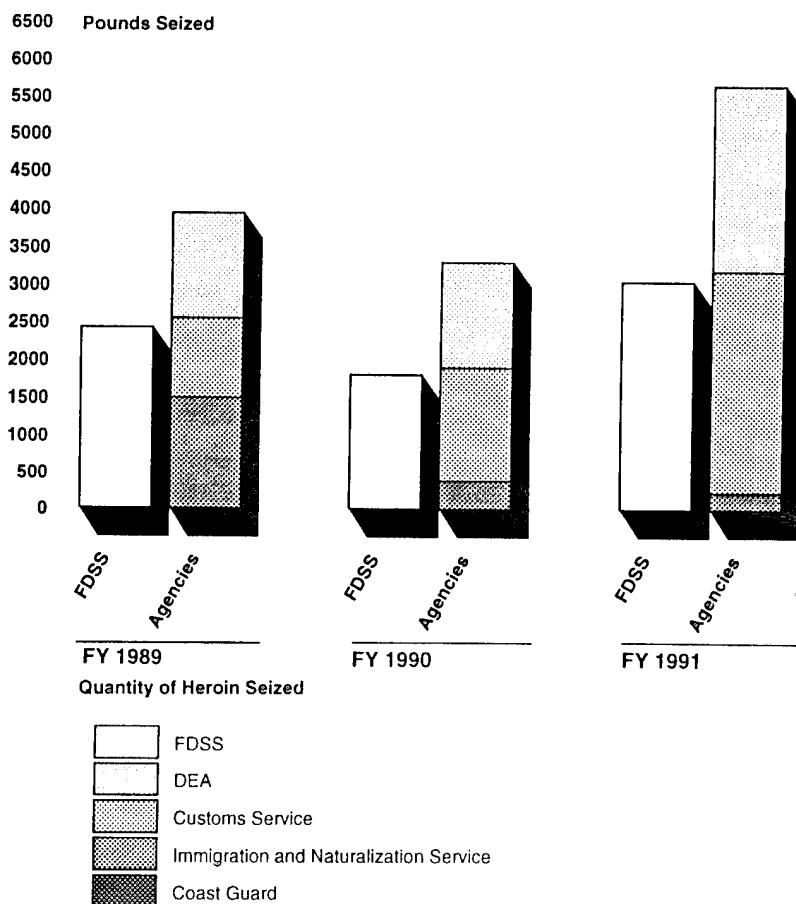
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ABBREVIATIONS

DEA      Drug Enforcement Administration  
FDSS      Federal-wide Drug Seizure System

COMPARISON OF FEDERAL-WIDE SEIZURES  
OF HEROIN TO INDIVIDUAL AGENCIES' SEIZURES

Figure I.1: Comparison of Heroin Seizures, FDSS Versus Individual Agencies, Fiscal Years 1989-1991



Note: Coast Guard seizures for these years were less than 1 pound.

NATIONAL HEROIN PRICE AND  
PURITY LEVEL DATA

Table II.1: National Average Price per Milligram for Heroin Purchases, Fiscal Years 1982-1991

Fiscal year	Price per milligram
1982	\$2.72
1983	2.89
1984	3.56
1985	a
1986	a
1987	a
1988	2.66
1989	1.79
1990	4.36
1991	2.12

Note: The national average price is a weighted average based on the price of drug purchases made in the participating DEA division cities.

<sup>a</sup>There were no price data available for 1985, 1986, and 1987. The Domestic Monitor Program was not run during these years because of a manpower shortage within the DEA Laboratory System.

Source: DEA.

## APPENDIX II

## APPENDIX II

Table II.2: New York City Average Price per Milligram for Heroin Purchases, Fiscal Years 1982-1991

Fiscal year	Price per milligram
1982	\$1.35
1983	1.72
1984	1.46
1985	a
1986	a
1987	a
1988	1.81
1989	1.64
1990	1.80
1991	0.75

Note: The average price is a weighted average based on the price of drug purchases made in New York City.

<sup>a</sup>There were no price data available for 1985, 1986, and 1987. The Domestic Monitor Program was not run during these years because of a manpower shortage within the DEA Laboratory System.

Source: DEA.

## APPENDIX II

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Table II.3: National Average Purity Level for Heroin Purchases,  
Fiscal Years 1982-1991

Fiscal year	Purity level (percent)
1982	7.1
1983	6.9
1984	6.9
1985	a
1986	a
1987	a
1988	23.6
1989	25.2
1990	18.2
1991	27.6

Note: The national average purity level is the weighted average based on the purity level of the drugs purchased in participating DEA division cities.

<sup>a</sup>There were no purity level data available for 1985, 1986, and 1987. The Domestic Monitor Program was not run during these years because of a manpower shortage within the DEA Laboratory System.

Source: DEA.

## APPENDIX II

## APPENDIX II

Table II.4: New York City Average Purity Level for Heroin Purchases, Fiscal Years 1982-1991

Fiscal year	Purity level (percent)
1982	3.8
1983	8.5
1984	10.4
1985	a
1986	a
1987	a
1988	34.3
1989	37.2
1990	37.0
1991	48.4

Note: The average purity level is a weighted average based on the purity of the drugs purchased within New York City.

<sup>a</sup>There were no purity data available for 1985, 1986, and 1987. The Domestic Monitor Program was not run during these years because of a manpower shortage within the DEA Laboratory System.

Source: DEA.

QUANTITIES OF HEROIN SEIZED BY  
FEDERAL AGENCIES

Table III.1: Federal-Wide Heroin Seizures, Fiscal Years  
1989-1991

Fiscal year	Pounds seized
1989	2,414.5
1990	1,794.4
1991	3,034.3

Note: Figures are from FDSS, which contains information about drug seizures made within the United States.

Source: DEA.

## APPENDIX III

## APPENDIX III

Table III.2: DEA Seizures of Heroin, Fiscal Years 1982-1991

Fiscal year	Quantity seized	
	Kilograms	Pounds
1982	234.0	514.8
1983	313.8	690.4
1984	354.2	779.2
1985	439.9	967.8
1986	390.4	858.9
1987	364.7	802.3
1988	835.1	1,837.2
1989	629.1	1,384.0
1990	637.0	1,401.4
1991	1,116.1	2,455.4

Note 1: Seizure data from this table cannot be added to other agencies' seizure data because this could result in double-counting of drug seizures. For example, if DEA participated in a seizure that involved one or more other federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies, each participating agency could, in fact, include the seizure in its drug seizure statistics. FDSS was implemented to eliminate the double-counting of drug seizures to provide more realistic national drug seizure data.

Note 2: DEA reports heroin seizures in kilograms. Conversion of kilograms to pounds by GAO. One kilogram equals 2.2 pounds.

Source: DEA.

## APPENDIX III

## APPENDIX III

Table III.3: U.S. Customs Service Seizures of Heroin, Fiscal Years 1982-1991

Fiscal year	Pounds seized
1982	289.9
1983	593.6
1984	664.3
1985	784.6
1986	692.4
1987	639.0
1988	1,350.5
1989	1,056.7
1990	1,504.5
1991	2,959.7

Note: Seizure data from this table cannot be added to other agencies' seizure data because this could result in double-counting of drug seizures. For example, if the U.S. Customs Service participated in a seizure that involved one or more other federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies, each participating agency could, in fact, include the seizure in its drug seizure statistics. FDSS was implemented to eliminate the double-counting of drug seizures to provide more realistic national drug seizure data.

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

## APPENDIX III

## APPENDIX III

Table III.4: Immigration and Naturalization Service Seizures of Heroin, Fiscal Years 1982-1991

Fiscal year	Quantity seized	
	Ounces	Pounds
1982	29.2	1.8
1983	176.6	11.0
1984	429.1	26.8
1985	371.4	23.2
1986	990.4	61.9
1987	1,327.4	83.0
1988	1,307.0	81.7
1989	23,767.6	1,485.5
1990	6,191.2	387.0
1991	3,717.3	232.2

Note 1: Seizure data from this table cannot be added to other agencies' seizure data because this could result in double-counting of drug seizures. For example, if the Immigration and Naturalization Service participated in a seizure that involved one or more other federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies, each participating agency could, in fact, include the seizure in its drug seizure statistics. FDSS was implemented to eliminate the double-counting of drug seizures to provide more realistic national drug seizure data.

Note 2: Immigration and Naturalization Service reports heroin seizures in ounces. Conversion of ounces to pounds by GAO. One pound equals 16 ounces.

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service.

## APPENDIX III

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Table III.5: U.S. Coast Guard Seizures of Heroin, Fiscal Years 1982-1991

Fiscal year	Pounds seized
1982	0
1983	0
1984	2.20
1985	1.00
1986	2.00
1987	0
1988	46.00
1989	0.05
1990	0
1991	0.01

Note: Seizure data from this table cannot be added to other agencies' seizure data because this could result in double-counting of drug seizures. For example, if the U.S. Coast Guard participated in a seizure that involved one or more other federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies, each participating agency could, in fact, include the seizure in its drug seizure statistics. FDSS was implemented to eliminate the double-counting of drug seizures to provide more realistic national drug seizure data.

Source: U.S. Coast Guard.

## APPENDIX III

## APPENDIX III

Table III.6: New York City Police Department Seizures of Heroin, Calendar Years 1982-1991

Calendar year	Pounds seized
1982	N/A
1983	52
1984	31
1985	166
1986	220
1987	180
1988	141
1989	1,089 <sup>a</sup>
1990	165
1991	89

N/A = Not available.

Note: Seizure data from this table cannot be added to other agencies' seizure data because this could result in double-counting of drug seizures. For example, if the New York City Police Department participated in a seizure that involved one or more other federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies, each participating agency could, in fact, include the seizure in its drug seizure statistics.

<sup>a</sup>832 pounds were seized in one case.

Source: New York City Police Department.

APPENDIX IV

APPENDIX IV

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